

EXPERIENCES IN SETTING UP THE HOME DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM IN PUERTO RICO

By
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I. Preparation before going to Puerto Rico: a personal analysis.

My decision to go to Puerto Rico was made so close to the time of leaving my regular work in Florida that little real preparation was made by anyone. Dr. Warburton as Director of Extension, U. S. Department of Agriculture, asked me to go to organize the program. Mrs. Ola P. Malcolm as Field Agent for the Southern Region encouraged me to accept. Director Newell, of Florida, was not enthusiastic but agreed to a leave of absence.

The only definite preparation on my part was Director Warburton's arrangement for me to meet the newly appointed Director for Puerto Rico, Dr. Barrus, in a day's session, so I could be assured he would approve and support the philosophy of Home Demonstration Work to which I subscribe. I did meet a specialist in agricultural work in Puerto Rico when he visited Florida with the Chamber of Commerce, and found out from him by what route I could travel from my State to Puerto Rico. That's how ignorant I was of geography. The only other specific remembered result of that conversation was his concern that I, being from the South, might not know how to recognize gracefully that no "color line" was defined in educational institutions in that Island. I did buy a new and big suitcase to carry all the bulletins and circulars I and interested friends considered essential, but which were never used. A copy of the Brookings Institute report on Puerto Rico was made available to me, which was valuable. Mrs. Roosevelt had just made a trip to Puerto Rico, so its name and some information about the Island appeared in the press, which I read with interest. In short we might conclude the only sound preparation for sending me to Puerto Rico to help establish Extension Work there, was a rather varied experience in organization and a familiarity with the products of Puerto Rico because of its similarity to Florida in seasons and crops. I was accustomed also to working with a people where a large proportion had the lowest incomes and education, and where the program of work must give practical economic assistance as well as education. But the preparation which really contributed most to the establishment of Home Demonstration Work in a new land was the fact I believed devoutly that a sound program of Extension Work should meet the following standards:-

1. That it is planned by the people themselves to meet their own needs.
2. That it should start with specific and definite and practical work in which results can be seen and demonstrations established in the homes of the people concerned.
3. That it should start with people 'where they are' and lead them on to greater things.
4. That its direction be assumed as quickly as possible by trained local people, well grounded in a philosophy of useful service, and who know and love their own land and understand it best.

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Since my experiences in Puerto Rico, my interest in life in Central and South American countries has led to the discovery of the splendid informational material available through the Pan American Union. Perhaps other countries have similar services which would help any worker to read going to strange countries.

II. Suggestions for a New Worker in Latin Countries to Consider in the Way of Preparation.

Granted the worker is selected for sound experience in Extension Work and can go to her new field with an open mind and interest in what is ahead, she will gain her most useful information after she reaches her destination. Do not belittle the matter of colorful personality in selecting associates for warm-hearted Latin people. 'Dynamic' and 'simpatico' are two much appreciated adjectives there in describing a successful home demonstration agent. Below are listed a few experiences and reactions in Puerto Rico which were potent factors in helping to set up happy relationships for the Extension Service and which can be considered in preparation for work in similar countries.

First, we announced at every possible opportunity that I, a stranger, had come only to share with the people there the experiences and results we had gained in Extension Work, so they might profit from our mistakes or successes. It was clearly stated always that an 'Americana' was there only because their insular government and their University had invited the United States Department of Agriculture to send someone to help them organize a new and cooperative program, and that my State of Florida was willing to "lend" me to a neighbor. All knew that my direction was temporary and that they would be expected to assume the responsibility for administering Extension Work as soon as they could find suitably trained, informed leaders. We took for granted always that capable leaders were there in Puerto Rico who could speedily be given the benefit of our organization experience in the States.

This expressed policy put us all at ease from the beginning. It resulted always in an expression of sincere appreciation for the cooperation of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and of the Government generally. And it is no small advantage in any program to avoid that justifiable resentment which unfortunately we have experienced at times in my own State - that "the natives" cannot find the right answers to their own needs, but must wait for salvation to come through the supposedly superior brain of some stranger.

It is to be understood in all this analysis that Puerto Rico wished to have the Extension Service established there. Leaders in education had worked for sometime with the Insular Legislature to secure the needed appropriations. The ground-work was well-laid.

Second, the first step seemed to be to get acquainted and to allow people there to inspect the newcomer they might or might not find acceptable. We made a definite plan to meet heads of agencies with whom we would be apt to associate. This experience had two-way values: - we learned and we taught. As a part of our discussion with the Commissioner of Education, which we sought early, he told me that home demonstration agents could not work with people living within a certain distance of rural-unit schools,

and the Extension Service would be expected to conform to this ruling. I explained that the agricultural agents were required to work with anyone desiring their help because the Agricultural Extension Service was financed out of the same purse that supported the rural-unit schools - that of the people, and that we, its representatives, were not permitted to define barriers to our services.

We called upon the dignitaries of the Catholic Church to ask their understanding and approval of the Extension Service program, which we did receive in generous measure.

We were fortunate that the Governor of Puerto Rico, General Blanton Winship, knew home demonstration work first-hand in his home State of Georgia, so his interest was unfailing and active. It meant a great deal to our new program to have the understanding support of officialdom.

Other agencies welcomed us - especially the heads of the Emergency Relief Administration known as P R E R A, which later through the director of its Agricultural Department, Mr. B. Matienzo, provided funds and active backing for an extensive canning project, which from all viewpoints was our most useful and most spectacular piece of work, and contributed the most to family economics and health.

A plan of rural rehabilitation to bring more people back to the land, known as the Plan Chardon, had just been approved prior to my arrival and the new home demonstration agents fortunately fitted into this plan remarkably well to give a needed service to resettled families.

Health authorities, especially those of the School of Tropical Medicine, helped us always. They checked on our methods of food preservation to meet climatic needs, and many other nutritional and sanitary programs.

A personal opportunity to live in the home of a Puerto Rican family, long distinguished for unselfish service to the Island, helped as much as any other factor to introduce me and establish my standards in the minds of the people of the Island.

The College of Agriculture, Department of Home Economics and the Agricultural Experiment Station supplied us with approved subject matter information, and we in turn showed our willingness to help them. The first service job done by the home demonstration agents was to help the Agricultural Economics Department make a farm-to-farm survey on farm and home resources; and the second was to conduct comparative cookery tests on all the varieties of sweet potatoes grown at the Experiment Station.

The Horticultural Department of the College of Agriculture loaned us an instructor to help home agents establish beautification demonstrations in all sections and in the absence of nurseries, his department grew plants for us to use in the demonstrations.

Some of our best cooperation and help came from business concerns, who were quick to see the possibilities of this practical program. The largest general store in San Juan, Los Muchachos, through its manager, Don Pedro Pedrera, ordered all our canning equipment. The American Can Company, commercial canners, let us buy all our tin cans at wholesale rates. Such cooperation is exceedingly valuable in a new program. What they helped with, their business men understood and pushed.

Third - One experience which came after arrival in Puerto Rico contributed as much as any other one factor to the development of the Home Demonstration program in Puerto Rico. It is reviewed here because undoubtedly it would be a useful procedure in any new program of Extension Work.

Quite without my knowledge, Director Warburton had agreed with Chancellor Carlos E. Chardon of the University of Puerto Rico that a group of outstanding recent home economics graduates would be assembled at the University to whom I would give a course in Home Demonstration work. From this group would be selected the six home demonstration agents which the first budget provided for. These twenty girls, selected by Miss M. T. Orcasitas, then head of the University's Department of Home Economics, had been waiting at the University for a week. I was nonplused indeed - no plans, no material, no nothing, but girls and me. They were too young to be home demonstration agents. None had any experience in any kind of position. They came from sheltered environments of good homes and families. But they were "smart" and I was a novelty, and they loved their Island. So we agreed we would spend five weeks of mutual study together - they to teach me about Puerto Rico - I to tell them our experiences with Home Demonstration Work in the States. We agreed to try to decide on some of the greatest needs of Puerto Rican families which the program of Home Demonstration Work might be expected to help them to meet. I was the one who profited most from this course. None of these girls were selected as home demonstration agents, but they did go out as home economics teachers into all sections, informed about the Home Demonstration program and as friends of our work. When the home demonstration agents finally were named and went to all parts of the Island, these young teachers extended them an eager welcome and gave fine cooperation.

Fourth - This item may seem inconsequential, but proved valuable. We discussed generally what to call this new program. We translated accepted Extension terminology into Spanish. We held spirited discussions about whether the translation should be 'Demonstracion en Hogar' or 'Demonstracion de Hogar'; should we say "Club Quatre Hache" for 4-H Club work, to take advantage of a national symbol, or should we adopt another name. We asked local artists to design the label for canned products. We argued long about the right translation for canning terms. Who could bring us the best translation of the 4-H pledge? What kind of report forms would be best, or least distasteful? Should we call the agents 'Agente' or some other title? Should we permit the agents to continue work after marriage and have time out for babies? We learned a lot together and established policies without talking about them too much.

III. Changes Which Might be Advisable in the Original Plan.

Looking most critically at the plans we made in 1934, in the light of the results of 10 years of work, most of the procedures proved to be satisfactory. In the first place, we went there with no preconceived ideas of what should be done. Thoughtful people of Puerto Rico really planned the program, as outstanding needs were evident to them or were brought to their attention. At the head of the list of persons who influenced and planned a sound program, I would name Miss Maria T. Orcasitas, then head of the Department of Home Economics, and active in securing the needed insular legislation. Miss Orcasitas' unfailingly wise counsel and good judgment in helping us make decisions about programs and personnel was the most important single factor in any success Home Demonstration Work may have had in Puerto Rico. She assumed the position of Assistant Director in charge of Home Demonstration Work in 1939, and has been responsible for the real development of the program to its present scope and influence.

We had good will to begin with. So far as Home Demonstration Work was concerned, we did not have any unfavorable experiences of the past to live down. The men's program within the Extension Service which absorbed some earlier work and personnel, had a more rocky road to travel. We were sure Extension Work could serve every kind of person, because a sound program meets needs of individuals as well as communities.

We found fine devoted men and women to become the Extension Agents. They saw "opportunity" rather than "problems" in their work, as O. B. Martin would say. We had equally fine people in the clerical positions in the central office. Always a feeling of special appreciation will be felt for the secretarial assistants who steered me well in my office relationships. This is no small item in any successful program.

We were content to proceed slowly - only six home demonstration agents were named the first year. These were selected from outstanding families of the Island, who already had the confidence of the people generally. A considerate director of Extension gave every possible aid.

Reviewing the difficulties or handicaps which a new worker could meet, we might name the following in our experience:

In Puerto Rico all my associates spoke "English." Otherwise, I would have been greatly handicapped without a knowledge of Spanish. I did learn to read Spanish quickly, and tried to teach a slurring tongue to master troublesome R's, and incidentally thereby became a source of constant entertainment for Spanish friends.

We had a big job to set up suitable local offices for the county workers and to get needed equipment. We would have been in a bad way and the program greatly handicapped if special concessions about the use of Federal funds had not been made by Director Warburton on our recommendation.

Sometimes it seemed that too many other Americans came to visit or to help or stayed too long, each one having to be introduced and explained and accepted and directed. But most of these visitors gave assistance valuable to the work.

Expenses were high for a stranger in a new land, and budgets and salaries provided did not cover expenses which had to be met, but could not be covered in an official expense account. This is a matter of concern in making future plans.

Politics and a somewhat unstable political pattern did affect Extension Work to some extent, and sometimes in unexpected spots. To do everything possible to avoid undesirable hindrances or entanglements politically speaking, is an essential goal always.

IV. Overcoming Prejudices to Women Professional Workers.

The work "prejudice" may not be well-chosen. Well-reared young women in southern countries have not been long found employed in positions outside sheltered class rooms. This undoubtedly would be the situation in Italy, Spain and Portugal. People are not accustomed to seeing them in public positions and so cannot and do not have much faith in their ability. The women probably lack self-confidence and properly hesitate to offend accepted conventions. But we needed the best to guide the new program - best in culture, best in standards. We made definite plans in Puerto Rico to interview the families of the young women we wished to interest in becoming home demonstration agents, especially their brothers and fathers. These interviews were usually held in their homes with the family present. These men helped us plan what areas of work might best be assigned to home agents to take best advantage of travel facilities. Contrary to our policy in the States, we located the new home agents where they had friends or relatives with whom they could live. Having been reared in a tradition not unlike this, it was not difficult for me to understand the family's concern for their adventuresome daughter. Our ready recognition of the importance of high standards on the part of the prospective agents brought our program into a favorable light before many influential men citizens, who became our thoughtful advisors.

We made a point of explaining the Extension Program to women who had already achieved distinction in public life, and enlisted their particular concern in Home Demonstration work. The one woman member of the Legislature, Miss Arcelay, was our special sponsor!

One point in organization which helped considerably to raise the general opinion of the value of a program involving women, was the fact that the administrative head of Home Demonstration Work was also Assistant Director of the entire Agricultural Extension Service program; and that when the first salaries were fixed, the home demonstration agents and the farm demonstration agents received like amounts and had coordinate offices. This established the dignity and scope of the Home Demonstration positions at the beginning of the work, although changes have been made since that date.

The individuals selected to organize Extension Work in Latin countries - or elsewhere, too, perhaps - might well be of a type quite willing to let much of the glory and public recognition of leadership go to her associates, especially the masculine contingent.

Another factor which might be considered is that we did not talk about work for women, or for men, or for children. We did not play up femininity, although not overlooking its possibilities. We never asked for equal rights for women, financially or administratively, in the planned programs. We always talked of the family and what definite work each family member could do best to make better farms or homes. In the same way we explained that the home demonstration agent and the farm demonstration agent each had their specific jobs to do, but each one was responsible as a member of the Agricultural Extension Service for working first for better living and a better family, for better incomes and a better Puerto Rico. Isn't this basic, if we want to avoid encouraging prejudices or antagonisms in any country?

V. Extent of Personal Service Type of Work

For at least the first two years the program of home demonstration work was a type of personal service. The program was based on the importance of establishing demonstrations in the home, using practical and scientific knowledge which would help the individual meet his own needs. These demonstrations were our best publicity for the program and our best preparation for a trained leadership among rural people. The interest in meeting as a group of neighbors at these demonstrations grew gradually and the first evidences of a desire for community or neighborhood organization came about naturally. This was important because organizations of women were unusual. The canning centers set up during the first months, also were a natural and logical meeting place on a subject of general interest and concern and were the nucleus or perhaps the beginning of community activities. It is interesting and significant to note that the early canning meetings were attended only by men. Achievement exhibits made by the women and girls and their attendance with their families at Achievement Day at the agent's office, developed family and community pride. This, too, was a personal service toward good citizenship.

In short, the home demonstration agents first had to be taught skills and methods. They in turn taught the specific skills and methods to the "demonstrators" according to their needs. Then the demonstrators were recognized by their neighbors as local leaders, by achievement rather than by appointment.

The thread of personal service ran through the entire program, and apparently has been the key to the present excellent flexible organization now evident in Home Demonstration Work in Puerto Rico. Now they have organized clubs and appointed local leaders. A desire to form an island-wide Council of rural women is growing and undoubtedly will be realized soon.

Home demonstration agents have "grown" too in understanding of their opportunities, as some of those pioneers would be the first to testify. The policy has been always to take useful information to the people desiring it in the form they can use it and at the time they need it.

VI. Extension Methods in Common Use in Florida Which Were Adaptable to Puerto Rico

Almost any method we have found useful in a State seemed to suit Puerto Rico, some of course with more limited effectiveness than others.

Among the more useful methods are the following listed in about the order of their effectiveness:

1. Home visits
2. Establishment of result demonstrations
3. Method demonstrations to give timely information before groups
4. Meetings, for instruction and entertainment
5. Volunteer Leadership - a gradual development and training

Among the less effective methods are the following:

1. Radio and films, because of lack of local equipment
2. Printed material and letters, as bulletins and circulars
3. Publicity through the press

Miscellaneous

From observations made during the recent visit to Puerto Rico, I consider the following factors have been highly important in developing the present excellent program there:

1. Emphasis was placed at all times and in all phases of work, on meeting economic needs of the people, with first place given to
 - a. Securing a better food supply. This required gardening, canning, some work on a meat supply (chickens, pigs, rabbits, etc.) good cookery, and better cooking facilities. This was important for families of all incomes because most food was imported, and was a sound nutrition program also.
 - b. Home industries for both 4-H girls and women to help increase the actual cash income of most families.
 - c. Provision of equipment or supplies through the Extension Service, which made it possible for such work to be done. As an example, establishment of canning centers, supplying breeding animals, nursery stock, providing a sales outlet for home industries products, etc., were necessary.
2. Emphasis placed on improved living conditions, especially physical improvements in the home which definitely helped family health, but was largely a stimulus to pride and to add interest to living. Beautification of the home and community through planting flowers and shrubs, and a definite plan of demonstration in home beautification in all areas, was required of all home demonstration agents and was considered as important as new stoves in the kitchen.
3. Emphasis was given in all work done to the belief that each individual person, regardless of economic status, could achieve and could have just pride in achievement, and by his example could contribute something of leadership to his community. This helped a great deal to improve attitudes and train citizenship in a crowded country.
4. We never emphasized organization as such but did encourage planning always and a practical type of organization grew out of local.

Interest and Needs.

A Comment

The illustrations and comments given in this report apply directly to the program of Home Demonstration Work in Puerto Rico. Somewhat similar progress was made in the entire Extension Service program, with a variation which is to be expected in work done by men for farmers and work done by women for their families. The similarity was to be expected because the Assistant Director in Charge of Home Demonstration Work was called in to work with the Director on most matters concerning the whole program, and partly because the Assistant Director possibly had more experience in field work and general administration of an Extension program than the Director, who had always worked as a specialist and head of a department of an agricultural college. The program of Home Demonstration Work profited always from the Director's long acquaintance with Puerto Rico and his great devotion for her people, as well as his fine attitude toward the work of the women agents.

A Summary

The illustrations and comments given in this report apply directly to the program of Home Demonstration Work in Puerto Rico. However, similar programs are held in the entire Extension Service program, with a variation which is to be expected in view of the fact that the program is run by women for their families. The similarity was to be expected because the Assistant Director in Charge of Home Demonstration Work was called in to work with the Director on most matters connected with the work program, and partly because the Assistant Director possibly had more experience in field work and general administration of an Extension program than the Director, who had always worked as a specialist and head of a department of an agricultural college. The program of Home Demonstration Work provided always for the Director's long acquaintance with Puerto Rico and his great devotion for her people, as well as his activities toward the work of the women in agriculture.

